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ABSTRACT

Based on the belief that schooling is now too often a trivial pursuit or a mechanical exercise, this book argues that the inherent value and substance of learning has been lost and needs to be restored. The book begins by portraying the American education of an earlier part of this century when schools created a coherent, stable, unified culture out of a people with diverse traditions, languages, and religions. The book notes that schools at that times were meant to provide citizens with a common attachment to America's history and its future, and its promise of freedom. It points out that there were narratives born of near-universal themes and principles--family honor, restraint, social responsibility, humility, empathy--and the distinctively American ideal of social equality. The book argues that the new "gods" that underlie the current conception of school are economic utility, consumership, technology, and separatism. It then presents useful narratives to help schools recover a sense of purpose, tolerance, and respect for learning--these include the "Spaceship Earth" (preserving the earth as a unifying theme); the "Fallen Angel" (learning driven by an understanding that knowledge is imperfect); the "American Experiment" (emphasizing the successes and failures of the evolving nation); the "Law of Diversity" (exposure to all cultures in their strengths and weaknesses); and "Word Weavers" (the fundamental importance of language in forging a common humanity). The book seeks to provide solutions while provoking debate. (NKA)

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